

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Resanctification of Wangduephodrang



His Majesty the King placing the first vessel at the site of the utse

His Majesty the King installs *sachu bumter* at the Wangduephodrang dzong where the utse of the dzong will be built. His Majesty placed the vessel at the site where Zhabdrung was believed to have meditated before constructing the Wangdue dzong in 1638. Seven *sachu bumters* were placed in total and these signified the resanctification of a site and restored its blessings. The reconstruction of the dzong officially began on January 28 and Project Director for the dzong's reconstruction, Kinley Wangchuk, said during the summer they would receive

the final and extended design of the dzong, which has been outsourced to a private consultant. On the command of His Majesty, the dzong, he said would be rebuilt to its former architectural magnificence, while incorporating modern technology to make the structure more resilient. The prime minister, ministers, senior and local government officials, dzongkhag and and monks of Wangdue rabdey attended the ceremony.

Bhutan challenge for Shropshire explorers

Two explorers from Shropshire are planning to cycle through Bhutan in a single day as part of a new documentary

Anthony Eddies-Davies and James Griffiths will complete a gruelling 268km (166 mile) route through Bhutan. Mr Eddies-Davies, director of Live The Adventure in Stottesdon, near Bridgnorth, will film the challenge on September 6 for a documentary he is making about Bhutan as a travel destination for adventure sports. He has been visiting Bhutan since 2006 to help promote tourism in the region after falling in love with the area, having spent half his life exploring and working in Nepal. Mr Eddies-Davies said: "The film will include home preparation and training for the journey of travelling and training across the country. It will be great to contrast this adventurous activity with the wealth of culture, tradition and natural beauty during this personal challenge, culminating in the 268 kilometre one-day race.

"It would be ideal if I could capture parallel journeys with a British rider and a participant, to ultimately capture the essence and attraction of Bhutan, not only as a mountain biking destination, but also a unique adventure travel location. "Mr Griffiths, a childhood friend of Mr Eddies-Davies, said: "The chance to visit the Himalayas whilst pursuing my passion for cycling is a once in a lifetime opportunity." Mr Griffiths will be raising money for Spinal Research.



SOCIETY NEWS

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Two Society meetings are being planned for Spring 2015

on

January 19th and March 25th

The first meeting planned for January 19th 2015, will be a talk by Professor David Park of the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. He will give a presentation about the fascinating work he is currently undertaking on restoration of wall paintings in Bhutan.

On page 3 you can read a summary of the important work he and his team are undertaking on some of those murals at the Tango dzong.

The meeting will take place at the Polish Club in South Kensington London at 7pm.

The next planned date is March 25th 2015, when Charlotte MacCaw, daughter of Dr. Aubrey Leatham, will present a talk based on historic images of Bhutan taken by her father during his visit in the 1960's.

Members will be circulated with full details of both meetings before the end of the year.

CONTACT LIST

We would like to remind members to make sure that the Membership Secretary has your latest e-mail address.

See page 8 for contact details

BHUTAN SOCIETY DINNER

Members, friends and guests gathered in the marvellous buildings of The Charterhouse on the evening of 19th September for the 22nd annual dinner of the Society. Most were able to take tours, guided by resident Brothers, to see the Chapel, gardens and The Great Chamber and to learn something of the fascinating history of The Charterhouse. A most enjoyable and tasty dinner followed in The Great Hall which, with our party of ninety two, was all but full to capacity. His Excellency Mr Sonam Tshong, Bhutan's ambassador to the EU, and his wife, Aum Nima Zam, were our principal guests and we were delighted to welcome fourteen other Bhutanese currently studying in the UK. Lively conversation continued after the Toasts, but even that had to stop when it was time to go home. As can be seen below, it was a most convivial evening in a very special place and enjoyed by all who were able to attend.



“The Michelangelo’s of Asia”

“The paintings in Tango are among the most important, beautiful and sacred in the world,” said Professor David Park, Director of Wall Painting Conservation at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

History of Tango

Tango Choying dzong is located at the end of the Thimphu valley. As the seat of the Drukpa Kagyu school of Buddhism, the fortress plays an important role as the seat of learning and propagating Buddhism in the country. Monks believe that the place is so sacred that seven days of meditation in Tango is equivalent to seven years of meditation elsewhere. Most of the current building was constructed in the late 17th century. The three-storied tower was built in the traditional fashion using stones, mud and timber and the central tower, which has twelve corners, makes the whole architectural façade unique and magnificent.



The Paintings

In 1690, the new murals were completed but separately consecrated. The priceless paintings of Tango are on the walls of the northern shrine rooms on the second and third floor of the utse. There are also some paintings in the secondary lhakhangs on the eastern and western sides of the utse.

According to Professor Park, the Tango paintings are of tremendous importance because of their religious significance, subject matter, art technique and the era in which they were painted.

Unlike modern Bhutanese paintings, the ones in Tango have not been produced in a workshop or painted on industrial produced cloth, as they have been painted directly on the adobe walls. The paints used are all from natural products; a style unique to the 17th century. The Tango paintings display sophistication in style and are of incredible quality and the gilding, details of the gold work, jewellery and drapery simply could not be better.

The Artist

Little is known about the artist. Tsang Khenchen and Trulku Mipham Chogyal helped start up the formal training of painters in the country. Both these artists were renowned in Tibet for their mastery of the Menri and Khenri style of paintings that were used in the Tango painting. Tsang Khenchen's two most famous trainees were Lhadrip Jangchub Sempa and Tenpa Gyamtsho (1646-1719). The former is credited with the paintings of the murals in the Tango monastery and the latter is known for his works in Taktsang monastery. Professor Park said that from his work, it is clear that the artist trained professionally for decades and he didn't know anyone in the world who could produce paintings like these. While it is possible that the artists were influenced by the Tibetan culture and artistic tradition, the frescos in Tango dzong are a fine example of environmental adaptations as the paintings have a distinctive pattern.

The Challenge

The rare murals on the walls of the northern shrine rooms of the utse were only discovered recently. In preparation of the renovation work, altars were moved and this is when the murals were discovered. In the haste to renovate the fortress, some of the walls on which these paintings sit could have been damaged if it were not for timely intervention by the Royal Family. Art historians and conservation experts say that the value of these unique paintings is enhanced when they remain in their original context in a building which retains its historical integrity. This is the case with Tango dzong, and the paintings it contains. It is important therefore to ensure that not only are these paintings preserved, but that the historical integrity of the whole structure is also conserved.

Enterprising Developments

Two significant developments have taken place recently to support aspiring entrepreneurs in Bhutan.

Firstly there was the launch of the long awaited Business Opportunity and information Centre (BOIC) on a national basis. BOIC had been set up to stimulate growth of cottage and small manufacturing industries and non-formal rural economic activities, by providing administrative and funding support. "Our objective is to take BOIC's services to every part of the country and ensure people from far flung villages get access to the services without having to come to Thimphu," said the CEO, Karma Tshering. "We will work with BDBL as a partner agency as it has a very good network coverage and experience in rural, cottage and small business."

Money for cottage industries, employing a minimum of two people, and for small scale industries, employing up to five people, will be released as a fund for each entrepreneur. There will be a 4 percent interest charge levied for a period up to 10 years but with an initial 3 to 12 months free of charges. "The funds will be used in agricultural activities including fishery, forestry and individuals running entrepreneurial enterprises in the country," said the Prime Minister Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay at the BOIC launch. BOIC will provide training to develop practical business skills of potential entrepreneurs and has also established a help desk for those starting up in business. BOIC expects to receive around 400 applications in the first year which can be applied for on-line through www.BOIC.gov.bt.



Secondly, in order to explore and develop the entrepreneurial potential of students, the Loden Foundation has launched its student empowerment through the entrepreneurship development programme. The Foundation has plans to introduce the idea of entrepreneurship to students in at least fifteen institutions. Seven colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan, including the Royal Thimphu College, have already been selected for the programme. The programme which will bring theoretical learning and practical experience of social

entrepreneurship to the young minds, will also identify and fund the best business proposals as selected by participating colleges. Through this programme, the Foundation hopes to make students more aware of the many career opportunities, especially for those seeking self-employment and also how they can in turn create employment opportunities for others.

Banning plastic on trekking routes

Unfortunately in many parts of the Himalayas the amount of plastic and other biodegradable waste is growing at an alarming rate and wreaking havoc with their fragile ecosystems. The debris is left by the growing number of trekkers and tourists visiting these areas. Whilst most governments responsible for the vast ranges of the Himalayas have banned the use, storage, sale and distribution of all types of polythene bags and also in some areas the use and storage of non-biodegradable disposable plastic cups etc and warned that violators would be heavily fined, it is evident that the law is ineffective. This growing amount of waste

throughout the Himalayas is also considered a threat to the fragile eco-system. Non-biodegradable waste absorbs heat, which along with global warming, raises the overall temperature in the mountains, melting glaciers and creating glacial lakes, thus posing a potential threat of glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in the future. If you see anyone leaving a plastic bag on a mountain slope after a trekking expedition, ask them to think again. In some areas non-biodegradable waste was 16.9% of total waste whilst in others it comprised 84.5% and 66.4% of the total generated waste and such non-biodegradable is much higher in trekking and expedition locations than the down-slope hill spots.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Cabinet approves development plan for six Eastern Dzongkhags

A frequent and often repeated comment is on the remoteness and associated limitations of Bhutan's Eastern region compared to other regions of the country.

The government, in an ambitious effort, has come up with and given in principal approval to a 30 page plan called 'East Development Initiative' (EDI) that aims to economically strengthen and develop six eastern Dzongkhags through a variety of national strategies.

The plan will cover Dzongkhags like Lhuentse, Mongar, Trashigang, Trashiyangtse, Pemagatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar with the combined total population of about 201,050 constituting about 27% of the national population.

These initiatives will create three regional growth hubs, improving accessibility and transport infrastructure, accelerating hydro-power development, establishing premiere educational institutes, establishing agro-based and green industries, improving tourism infrastructure, establishing referral hospitals and providing policy support.

Soon after the elections, the new government tasked four ministers from the East to come up with a comprehensive plan for the region. The plan was in line with one of PDP's major pledges called the 'Rising East' which talked about bringing about more regionally balanced development. The ministers, however, were at pains to point out that this should be seen in a larger national perspective as developmental activities in the East would also benefit the rest of the nation in many ways.



New Traditions?

A World Bank specialist recently expressing his impression of Bhutan, wrote that Bhutanese are no longer valuing traditional buildings. That was quite a dramatic statement but, except for a few buildings constructed with strict architectural conditions and with government or donor fund, there is little traditional architecture seen in new housing these days.



To ensure that traditional Bhutanese architecture is not compromised, the Works and Human Settlement Ministry is drafting further guidelines, as earlier ones were not followed. The need for updating was felt to be necessary after having received criticism from tourists, as well as from many Bhutanese, on the kind of modern buildings now being built in the country. Works and Human Settlement Secretary, Dasho (Dr) Sonam Tenzin, in explaining the history of traditional Bhutanese architecture, said, "In olden days, architecture was not something that could be learnt over one or two years. Traditional houses, whether built from stone, rammed wall or adobe bricks, had their distinct characteristic and artisan builders picked up skills from elders from a very young age".

However as the rice fields gave way to urbanization, houses were being built mainly by thousands of expatriate labourers, who have largely replaced Bhutanese artisans. Another reason for the changes was the availability of cheaper contemporary construction materials. Dasho (Dr) Sonam Tenzin said, once the guidelines are ready, they would be more practical. However he did acknowledge that implementation could be challenging. Numerous awareness workshops and meetings would be organised on a regular basis. Architects would be trained and might need to sit a test, before being certified as competent designers.

Recycling initiative at school

Jigme Losel Primary School in Thimphu earned about a million Ngultrum last year by selling recyclable waste.

Last year the school started the initiative of collecting and selling waste. The students carry not only their books to school, but also a bag of waste which includes such items as cardboard boxes and plastic bottles. Parents join in and help their children carry this recyclable waste to school. They believe it is not only a great initiative, but the profits earned have also enabled the school to buy many additional items such as water filters, pipes and a television set. The school principal, Choki Dukpa says, "We realised that so much waste can be collected and recycled, and when the whole school is involved, it comes to a very large amount".



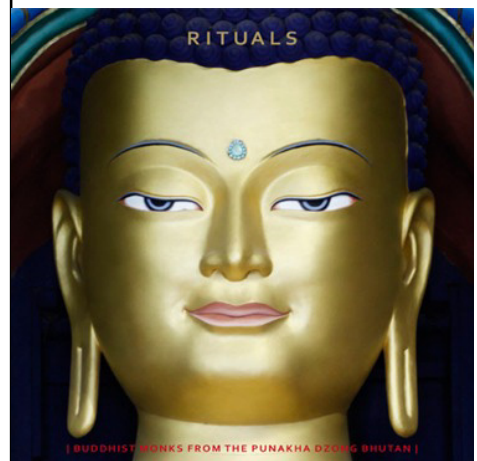
Such initiatives to manage waste productively are always welcomed by Thimphu Thromde as it struggles to tackle the growing waste problem in the city. According to Thimphu Thrompon, Kinlay Dorjee, the landfill at Mamilakha is getting full and there is an urgent need to look for an alternative site. "Therefore, rather than starting another landfill site, we want to segregate waste and recycle items wherever possible. So, these initiatives by schools, by graduates, and the public at large to segregate recyclable waste are really commendable and the city would definitely support such initiatives". Meanwhile, the school intends to continue with the initiative to earn a further Ng million.

Domestic flight options

Scheduled domestic flights by Drukair to Bumthang were stopped by the airline in early June due to disruptions caused during the monsoon season. However they are available again and will continue until the monsoon season next year. The airline flies on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to Bumthang and is very popular during October when the Bumthang tshechu occurs. Flights are currently not available to the country's other two domestic airports in Trashigang and Sarpang. Yonphula airport in Trashigang is closed at least until 2016 for major re-structural work, while more infrastructure and security arrangements have to be constructed at Gelephu.

Religious music and chants from Bhutan

In Bhutan, the contribution of religion towards shaping the country, promotion and preservation of its unique culture and developing a closely knit society, is very significant. The monasteries for centuries have educated and trained the Bhutanese population, long before the establishment of secular schools in the mid-sixties. Preservation of most forms of arts and crafts, dance, literary and traditional practices have been the handiwork of the Monk Body and religious leaders. In fact, monk scholars have been at the forefront of preserving the history and tradition of the country. On this CD recording a number of monks from Punakha Dzong, perform a variety of religious music. Ritual music and chant are integral to Buddhist traditions and have been in practice for many centuries. It is not only a living culture that made Bhutan a unique place in the eyes of the world, but has made Bhutanese religious traditions different and distinctive from other Buddhist traditions.



Copies of the CD can be ordered on line. Cost is € 36.00. For further information contact : Martin Hess Röntgenstrasse 74 CH 8005 Zürich Switzerland or via e-mail on rituals@buddhist-monks-bhutan.com

National Symbols of Bhutan - The Takin

In the next few issues we will explore some of the interesting background to the national symbols of Bhutan.

In 1905, a British Political Officer photographed a baby takin in Bhutan, in its natural habitat. In doing so, John Claude White (1853-1918) became the first European to obtain documentary evidence of the ungulate animal. Until then, the West considered the takin as a mythological animal and believed it was the 8th century, Greek mythological animal, the Golden Fleece.



It is of great interest, as being the first photograph of this curious ruminant ever taken; while the animal it represents is believed the first example of its kind ever seen alive by Europeans. This animal was given by the Tongsa Penlop of Bhutan to John Claude White, when a Political Officer in Sikhim. It died the day after the photo was taken. According to the Proceedings of the London Zoological Society in 1909, "The animal was captured by natives and brought to Mr. White's camp, where it lived for some time, and appeared healthy, and strong hopes were entertained of the possibility of transporting it to England. Sadly it died, supposedly from having eaten the aconite which abounds in some part of the district."

Two years later, in 1907-1908, J. C White returned to Bhutan as the representative of the Government of India to attend the coronation of the first king. This time, White entered Bhutan via the Tremola pass in Paro and left via Jaigon. On this trip, he managed to send specimens and a living takin to the Zoological Gardens in London. The Gardens named the takin, ***Budorcas taxicolor whitei*** in his honour.

It states that the Bhutan takin arrived at the Zoo on 22nd June 1909 and died on 7th May 1918. Another Englishman fascinated with the takin, was Malcolm Lyell (1921- 2011). Lyell was a close friend of the third and fourth king. In the 1970's he trekked through the natural habitat of the takin in northern part of Bhutan, an area that was largely restricted. White may have been the first to take a photograph of the takin but Lyell

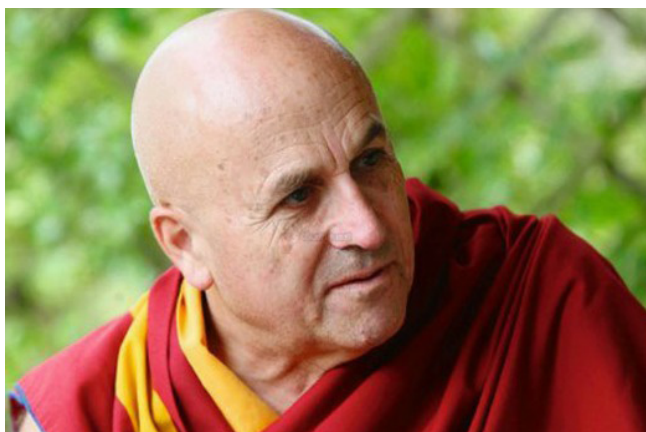


was certainly the first to take a colour photograph of the takin. Lyell took photos of baby takins that were being brought into the capital from the highlands. Lyell mentions in a note: "Nine days later, when we returned to Thimphu, ... we found the two takins had reached there safely and were happily wandering around the garden of the Royal Cottage, when we went to see the king." The takin is the national animal of Bhutan and it remains a subject of great interest to visitors at the Takin Reserve at Thimphu. The animal is believed to be made up of Ox, Antelope, Sheep and Goat. The reason for declaring the takin as a National Animal of Bhutan on 25 November 2005 is attributed to a legend of the animal's creation in Bhutan in the 15th century by Lama Drukpa Kunley "The Divine Madman".

On the Path to Compassion

A new film about Matthieu Ricard has been chosen to be shown at the 17th annual United Nations Association Film Festival. The UNAFF stands out as one of the most reputable film festivals in the US, exclusively dedicated to documentary filmmaking.

Forty years devoted to the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism have made Matthieu Ricard, a courier between East and West. Scientist, Buddhist monk, French interpreter for the Dalai Lama, photographer and author of texts on Buddhism and meditation, he is considered a man of the world. He now spends much of his time on humanitarian projects in India and Nepal. He regularly participates in scientific studies on the effect of meditation on the brain, and hopes his knowledge and his humanist philosophy will benefit the well-being and vitality of the greatest number.



Matthieu devotes all of the copyrights and profits of his lectures to more than one hundred humanitarian projects he has created in the Himalayan regions - clinics, schools, orphanages, retirement homes and care for the elderly, bridge construction, vocational training and safeguarding the Tibetan cultural heritage.

The film, which is 52 minutes long, is directed by Jeanne Mascolo and produced by Isabella Gripon. Further information is available on:

http://www.unaff.org/2014/f_matthieu.html

Suicides rates increase

The average world rate is 11.6 percent per 100,000 inhabitants. Using records maintained by the Royal Bhutan Police from 2009 to 2013, the average rate of suicide in Bhutan has increased from 8 percent in 2010 to 13 percent in 2013. The highest incidence was in young men below the age of 25 years. Taking occupations into account only one officer level individual had committed suicide, all others being drivers, labourers, housewives, farmers, students etc. This would suggest that they had stress related financial problems or social stress as a result of not having the resources to keep up to the current levels of social functioning now being set as the new norms in the society. In terms of preventive action, it would focus initially on those who are economically poor, have low social support, low self esteem with feelings of mental stress.

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NOTE

If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:

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who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

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